

AMSTERDAM

1897 armory serves as film setting

Movie short shot in 'Diana's Castle'

BY JUSTIN MASON
Gazette Reporter

It's not too often that Susan Phemister finds herself blind and wandering through a centuries-old brick castle with an escaped serial killer and his lover from the CIA.

But eight months after sending out an e-mail to friends, Phemister and her husband, Manfred, became the unlikely hosts for the shooting of "God's Good Pleasures," a 15-minute film short depicting the surreal love affair between fictional murderer Massimo Belcuore and Luz Tiburon, an undercover American operative.

All but one scene for the film was shot at the former Amsterdam Armory, a 19th century brick castle that looms over Amsterdam's South Side.

When initially developing the script, writer and director Dawn Westlake had planned to shoot the film on location in the small northern Italian city of Trieste, the hometown of the film's co-star, Davide del Degan.

"Then we received an e-mail that said: 'We've just bought a castle,'" Westlake recalled.

Originally from New York City, the Phemisters first spotted the armory building, also known as "Diana's Castle" after its former owners, when it was listed for sale on eBay.com.

The family has since taken up residence in the armory, which was built in 1897 to house National Guard troops.

Though it had been nearly four years since Westlake had last seen Phemister, a friend from childhood, she was immediately intrigued by the e-mailed message

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HANS PENNING/GAZETTE PHOTOGRAPHER

Susan Phemister, left, Dawn Westlake and Davide del Degan discuss the filming of "God's Good Pleasures" at the former armory, now Phemister's home, in Amsterdam on Wednesday.

Movie: 'Diana's Castle' site of film shoot

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and the impressive pictures that accompanied it.

"We were vaguely keeping in touch," recalled Phemister. "Then, it all clicked with the castle."

So, instead of departing for overseas with a small film crew, she hopped aboard a plane for New York to scout out the turreted fortress her friend had described. Sure enough, she found spaces to shoot nearly every scene in the short movie, save for one, which was shot in a forest in Schoharie County.

The rest of the film features various areas of the armory, which doubles as the movie's castle, a hotel lobby and a prison cell.

"I actually had cell options here," remarked Westlake regarding the armory's basement containing a number of rooms that once were used for ammunition storage but look like they might be in a prison.

In addition to supplying the location, the Phemisters also found themselves making cameo appearances in the film: Susan plays the role of the blind proprietor of a hotel visited by the lovers; her husband is featured as an Italian police officer in a jail scene. Also getting in on the action was Abraham Diana, the son of the Armory's former owners, who plays a brief role as a television journalist in the film.

After 10 days of shooting in Amsterdam

earlier this month, Westlake's crew will spend the month of June editing the film with the expectation of a premiere in Italy, during the Fano International Film Festival in October. She said the short film is also expected to be aired via cellphones, a trend that is gaining popularity in Europe.

Westlake also said she would like to find a theater in the Capital Region to show the short and would be thrilled if a local theater in Amsterdam expressed interest, perhaps even before the Italian debut next fall.

"You make movies so that people can see what you're thinking about," she said.

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Vale: Police in the dark after wire pulled

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